

Lower Shore Clinic

Richard Bearman, Clinic Director; Tuesday Trott, Clinic Administrator

Dedicated to serving the public, and particularly those without access to affordable and effective health care, Lower Shore Clinic maintains its commitment to the welfare of the people on the Lower Eastern Shore. This community based outpatient clinic exists to provide effective, integrated, and affordable mental health and primary care to people whose lack of means would otherwise prevent them from having any. No one is denied services for inability to pay.

Lower Shore Clinic began operations in late 1999. The Wicomico public mental health clinic was originally operated by the County Health Department until 1997 when Peninsula Regional Medical Center (PRMC) took over for two and a half years. PRMC concluded that it could not afford to sustain the staggering financial losses operating the clinic entailed for it and the Wicomico County Health Officer asked Go-Getters, a community based psychiatric rehabilitation program, to step in. Lower Shore Clinic, an independent corporation, was founded and was granted an operating license. In early 2000, all 450 clients who wished to continue treatment and all therapists from the PRMC clinic were transferred seamlessly to Lower Shore Clinic.

The clinic provides psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners who offer pharmacotherapy (medication) and therapists (nurses, social workers and counselors) who offer group and individual psychotherapy to assist people recovering from debilitating mental illness to live, work and play successfully in the larger community. Now, after twelve years as a mental health practice, Lower Shore Clinic added primary care in 2012, initially for its existing clients, but opening to the larger community in mid-2013. To enhance the services offered, the clinic doubled in size with help from the Henson and Weinberg Foundations, and added a primary care wing. When the major safety net primary care clinic in the county closed in 2013, Lower Shore Clinic absorbed over 1000 patients within a year to reach its current caseload, now in excess of 2000.

Since integrated care is the goal, the clinic is engaged in a process to become a Federally Qualified Health Center – Look Alike [FQHC-LA] or, if Maryland is chosen as a pilot state under the Excellence in Mental Health Act, a Certified Community Behavioral Health Center (CCBHC). Either designation will benefit clients and the larger community by offering a broad array of integrated health care: primary and family care, women's health, mental health, substance abuse treatment, and, looking forward, access to pediatrics and dentistry. A small but comprehensive pharmacy open to the public has begun filling prescriptions and rounds out the one-stop shop element of Lower Shore Clinic.

Today, the clinic provides behavioral health and primary care services for adults and offers help for patients who have mental illness and substance abuse issues. There are currently 100 hours of psychiatric prescriber time weekly available for adults with general issues of mental illness. There are ten full and part-time highly trained and experienced therapists and several bright and kindly administrative personnel who contribute to the success of the establishment. In addition, the clinic offers 100 hours per week of primary care prescriber time augmented by nursing care in a beautiful new wing. Finally, two Assertive Community Treatment teams serve an eight county area, bringing outreach care to folks who cannot or will not use site-based services.

Lower Shore Clinic initiated the open access walk-in hour offered at the clinic every morning between 8 and 9 am. People who need care are seen on a first come, first served basis. The walk in hour has reduced the clinic's no-show rate to below 10% for the past seven years and to 8% for the last two, unparalleled in the state. Initial psychiatric evaluations and initial physicals are likewise on a walk-in basis. The clinic maintains a close relationship with Go-Getters' outreach teams. This enables outreach advocates to provide assistance and support to people who wish to have help in their homes and workplaces as well as in clinic offices.

The clinic has lost money every year, generally in direct proportion to the number of individuals served who cannot pay for their care. Average loss is \$80,000, which has been made up by Go-Getters Foundation with some assistance from the Weinberg Foundation, Wicomico Health Department, and Wicomico CSA. We are seeking an annual support commitment from the Wicomico County and Salisbury City governments.

Lower Shore Clinic is located at 505 East Main Street in Salisbury. Call 410-341-3420 for more information.